

Light and Salvation

Psalms 27:1-14

Key verse: 1 “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

Thank God who has blessed our summer Bible conference abundantly. We also celebrated Independence Day. I still smell the BBQ on you. It is time to return to Psalms. In the 4 Psalms we have studied, we learned how God our Shepherd helps us. In Psalm 8 God is making us to be like Him. When we draw closer to him in all our struggles, weaknesses and challenges, God equips us (Psalm 18), God hears us (Psalm 22), and God shepherds us (Psalm 23). As we draw nearer to God our Shepherd, we know him personally. We love and trust him with all our hearts. May God bless our Psalm study continually.

My opening question today is “Are you confident in life? Or fearful?” There are many things that make us afraid: financial difficulty, poor health, the uncertain future, broken relationships, global warming, wars, just to name a few. While living in this uncertain world, how can we grow in confidence? In what should we put our trust? In Psalm 27, David shows how he has cultivated his confidence in the Lord. Through his message, may God teach us how to cultivate our confidence in the Lord in 4 steps.

First, declare that the Lord is your Light and Salvation (1-3)

Verse 1 tells us what David does even before he walks into his tumultuous life. Let's read verse 1 together. “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” This psalm gives us several hints of David's situation: evildoers (2), adversaries (2), foes (2), army (3), war (3) and false witnesses (12). His life is hanging in the balance. However, he does not give in to fear. He declares to himself who the LORD is; the LORD is my light and my salvation; the LORD is the stronghold of my life. David declares to himself who God is, each day, each morning, each moment before he faces the realities and unknowns of his life.

How do you begin each day, each morning? With coffee? By checking email and the overnight news? By waking up your children and spouse? How you start each day determines how you live throughout the day. In Psalm 5:3a David says, “O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice...” The Lord wants to hear us and walk with us throughout each day. When you turn on the computer, what boots up first? If you have a PC, it's Microsoft Windows. It provides the optimal environment for each app. In the same way, begin with the Lord each day. Let the Lord: your light, your salvation, your strength, be your operating system that activates your heart, mind, emotion, and even your body. It doesn't take even 1 minute. Let's do it right now. Let's declare verse 1 to ourselves. “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is

the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" If you prefer psalm 23:1, it works as well. "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."

By the way, where does David get such confidence? Look at verse 2; especially notice the tense of the verbs. In ESV, they are written in the present. However, other translations like KJV, NASV, Amplified Bible put them in the past. David's confidence comes from his past experiences. His confidence in the Lord is not just a mental exercise but it has been tested and proved in real situations. For example, David, a shepherd boy, went out to fight against Goliath, a giant. Goliath said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?...Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field" (1Sam 17:43-44). Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied" (1Sam 17:45). Who won? David won! You can watch the rest of the story on Netflix. David's confidence in the Lord has been tested and proved in wars. Therefore, David is confident in the Lord here and now as his light, salvation and stronghold.

Look at verse 3. Again notice the tense of the verb. He says, "... yet I will be confident." In the footnote of the ESV, "yet" is "in this." "... in this I will be confident." Yes, he is not afraid of the unknown future. He will be confident that the Lord will drive out any darkness and show him His way. He will be confident that the Lord, his salvation, will rescue and deliver him from any harm and danger. He will be confident that the Lord, his stronghold and refuge, will protect him from any and every enemy. David declares who the Lord God is to him no matter what is and will be in his way. He won't let fear enter into his heart.

Why are people fearful? I have suffered from a midlife crisis. I am in my mid 50's. Once I was strong enough to move a piano with my son Peter. But now I have problems on my left-side of my face after the two major brain surgeries 10 years ago. My knees bother me when I play tennis. What is worse, when I look back on my life, I feel I haven't achieved much. When I look forward, I am not sure whether I can do much for my family and for the church. I am often not confident in my life. But why are we fearful? On the surface, it is because we feel that our situations are beyond our control. We know our weaknesses and limitations. We know we cannot control our lives. But look deeper! We are fearful because we trust in ourselves. What are in our hearts? Idols! Yes, idols! To some, money or family; others, jobs, ministry; even control of our lives, or the respect of others are idols. If we truly want to live a life with confidence, we ought to repent of self-dependence, idol-worship. Then believe that we have been crucified with Christ by faith and acknowledge that Christ lives in us (Gal 2:20). We are new creations with Christ as our King in our hearts (2Co 5:17). We can declare again and again every day, every morning that Jesus is my Light, my salvation, and the stronghold of my life. We are ready to live each new day and face new or even the same challenges through Jesus.

Second, desire one thing (4-6).

Verse 4 tells us that David does something more to cultivate confidence in the Lord. Let's read verse 4a. "One thing have I asked of the Lord that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life..." David's single desire is to dwell in God's presence all

the days of his life. In his uncertain life, he could desire something else. He, however, seeks after God's presence. Why? It is because God is the true source of light, salvation and strength for him. What is one thing you desire? When we desire many things with our limited resources, we easily become fearful and discouraged. However, when we dwell in the Lord, the ultimate source of life, light, and love, we shall lack nothing. Do you know that God's presence is a bigger and more powerful reality than any of your realities?

What does David want to do in God's presence? Look at verse 4b. He says, "...to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple." To gaze upon someone means to look steadily and intently, especially in admiration, surprise and thought. David desires to gaze upon the beauty, the delightful loveliness and majestic grandeur, of the LORD. And he also desires to inquire of the Lord. To inquire of the Lord is to meditate on the Lord according to the ESV footnote. As David dwells in God's presence, he desires to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and meditate on him.

What do you desire? What do you gaze and meditate on? The Bible gives us very important lessons on desires. James 1:14-15 warns us of the terrible danger of having wrong desires as follows, "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." Therefore Philippians 4:8 says, "...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." We are to gaze and meditate on the beauty of the Lord. Watch out and be careful at what you look at habitually and think about without intent. May God help us desire not the things that are fleeting, deceiving and sinful, but one thing: dwelling in God's presence to gaze upon His beauty.

By gazing upon the beauty of the Lord, David is now confident that many blessings will follow him. Look at verses 5-6. David is sure that God will become his hiding place, haven in the days of trouble. God will exalt his name. Therefore David, in verse 7, decides to offer sacrifices with shouts of joy and sing and make melody to the Lord in advance.

So far so good. David seems to be confident in the Lord. However, from verse 7, David's tone changes. We don't know exactly what happened to him. However, we understand why David's mood changes drastically. We know our moods can change any moment like the Chicago weather. We face the sudden realities of life; our own weaknesses and sins are exposed, something happens to the people we love. Our bosses suddenly become demanding, we get stuck in Chicago traffic or get a parking ticket or get in a car accident. We read shocking news. We face sudden financial instability, etc. What shall we do when our heart sinks?

Thirst, seek the face of the Lord (7-13)

Look at verse 7. David cries aloud immediately to God asking his grace and answer to him. He won't leave his relationship with God fractured even for a moment. He is like a little baby who cries when he can't see his mother. Look at verse 8. While crying desperately, David remembers God's invitation: "Seek my face," and his heart says to God, "Yes, 'Your face, Lord, do I seek.'"

While still living in this sinful world with our unrelenting sinful nature, we are easily tempted to sin. Our confidence in the Lord can easily shatter. Satan's whispers of lies, doubt, guilt, shame and fear creep into our hearts. David, however, does not give in to darkness, slavery and condemnation as he used to. David cries aloud to the Lord in prayer. He fights spiritual battles in prayer. While praying, he remembers God's invitation: "Seek my face!" In 2 Chronicles 7:14 God says, "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." Don't you hear Jesus knocking at your heart saying, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20).

What is it to seek God's face? And what is it not? After Jesus fed the five thousand in John 6, he went to the other side of the lake. The crowd then followed Him seeking Him. Jesus knew that they sought Him only for free physical food. Jesus then went on to teach the crowd the importance of seeking only Him as the bread of life (Jn 6:35). Jesus wants us to be in him and he in us, as our true spiritual food. Jesus invites us to seek Him, not just seek him for what we want and need from him. He wants us to seek to have a personal and living relationship as if we see him face to face. Seeking God's face means being alive, present, and engaging with him. It is to give honor, glory and power to Him. Do you want to seek God's face?

Some of us may ask, "Is it possible to see the face of the invisible God?" If not, God wouldn't ask us to do it! Then how can we see his face? In 2 Co 4:6, Apostle Paul says, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." "Christ is the visible image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15a). We can see God's glory, God's smiling face in Christ Jesus, full of grace and truth with the eye of our hearts (Jn 1:14). Where is the place where we can see God's face clearly? It is Jesus on the cross. His crucified body and shed blood on the cross displays God's face of love and justice toward sinners like us. God hates sins but loves sinners so much that he crucified his own Son in our places. God is inviting each of us to see his face in his Son Jesus Christ. When we see God's face in Jesus Christ, we can be confident in the goodness of our God like Apostle Paul. He says in Romans 8:31-39. "... If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

If your confidence in the Lord has not grown much, do not give up. Here is good news. Our spiritual growth in confidence is not solely up to us. It is God who began his good work in us (Php 1:6). God opens our spiritual eyes to see his face in Christ Jesus. Just keep on struggling to see God's face in Christ Jesus. Look at David in verses 9-10. He still struggles to put his trust in the Lord by faith in prayer.

As we seek God's face moment by moment, we can have courage to walk in the truth in this real world. In David's case, he must carry out his duty as king over Israel according to God's will, facing all kinds of enemies and problems. Look at verse 11. He asks God to teach him His way. He also pleads with God to lead him on a level path. "A level path" isn't an easy one but an even and plain path. He does not avoid his enemies, adversaries, false witnesses, but he stands strong on a level path and fights spiritual battles in confidence of God's protection and guidance. As he keeps struggling to put his trust and confidence in God alone, something amazing happens. Look at verse 13. "I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." His present nation looks like the land of the dead covered with dead bodies, ruins of wars. But David is sure that his land will be filled with life through God's goodness..

Fourth, wait for the Lord (14)

As David wraps up his poem, he counsels himself and his people to do one thing more in verse 14. "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!" Do you like to wait? I hate waiting for the doctor. But here to wait for the Lord is not passive, but active waiting with great expectation. My wife taught me the difference between diamond and coal. They are made up of the same chemical element, which is Carbon (C). When C remains under high pressure and temperature for a long and long time, it becomes a diamond. Otherwise, carbon becomes coal for fuel. Do you want to become diamond or coal? Then wait for the Lord in all kinds of pressures. Don't take matters into your own hands. Wait for the Lord! God who began his good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ (Php 1:6). Therefore, be strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 6:10).

It is a life-long process to cultivate our confidence in the Lord as our own light, salvation and strength. May we remember the four steps: 1) Declare, 2) Desire one thing, 3) Seek the face of the Lord, and 4) Wait for the Lord. May God guide us as we cultivate our confidence in our Lord Jesus Christ, our Light, Salvation and Strength.